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ABSTRACT

This study compared Japanese and American ideals regarding marital and extra-marital friendship, intimacy, and employment related socialization. Questionnaire data from samples of Japanese (N=872) and American (N=843) subjects were analyzed for differences. Compared with the Japanese subjects, American subjects were found to place a higher value on marital friendship, on emotional intimacy within and outside of marriage, on spousal involvement in work-related socialization, and on socialization as a couple rather than as individuals. In contrast, the Japanese subjects were found to believe more strongly that close friendships outside of marriage would have harmful effects on marriage. Nevertheless, the Japanese subjects tended to believe more strongly that husbands should socialize with co-workers after work rather than go home to be with the family, if such socialization would facilitate career advancement. Neither group was supportive of employed wives/mothers socializing with co-workers rather than being with their family. (Author)

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Friendship and Socialization:
A Comparison of Japanese and American Ideals*

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ABSTRACT

This study compares Japanese and American ideals regarding marital and extra-marital friendship, intimacy, and employment related socialization. Questionnaire data from samples of Japanese (n = 872) and American (n = 843) subjects were analyzed for differences. Compared with Japanese, Americans were found to place a higher value on marital friendship, on emotional intimacy within and outside of marriage, on spousal involvement in work-related socialization, and on socialization as a couple rather than as individuals. In contrast, the Japanese were found to believe more strongly that close friendships outside of marriage would have harmful effects on marriage. Nevertheless, Japanese subjects tended to believe more strongly that husbands should socialize with co-workers after work rather than go home to be with family, if it facilitates career advancement. Neither group was supportive of employed wives/mothers socializing with co-workers rather than family. Findings are analyzed in terms of cultural differences and social change.

Introduction

Contemporary Americans tend to construe or idealize marriage as a relationship involving intimacy and sharing of feelings, interests and worries. Spouses are often idealized as "best-friends." Work relationships are usually considered important, but secondary to family relationships.

In Japan, women traditionally had a (same sex) best-friend outside of marriage, with whom intimate feelings, interests, and worries were shared. Men are expected to socialize with co-workers after work to advance their careers. In extreme cases, evening work and recreation with co-workers keeps male breadwinners away from home for long periods of time. At the same time, there is a growing appreciation for love, intimacy and togetherness as a basis for marriage (in a culture where most marriages were arranged by parents not long ago).

This study explores, compares and contrasts Japanese and American ideals regarding marital and extra-marital friendship and socialization.

Method

Questionnaire. As part of a larger study of Japanese and American beliefs and values, a questionnaire was designed to assess attitudes and beliefs about friendship and

socialization in marriage and work relationships. Likert scale type items offered response options of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Questionnaires were pretested on American subjects, revised, and translated into Japanese. Then the Japanese version of the questionnaire was "back translated" (Brislin, 1980) into English and revised to maximize translation accuracy.

Sample. Over 800 (406 men, 466 women) Japanese and 800 (274 men, 569 women) American adults completed questionnaires. The mean age of Japanese subjects was 31 years compared with 33 years for Americans. Both Japanese and American subjects reported an average of 14 years of education. Sixty-one percent of Japanese subjects were (ever) married, compared with 58 percent of American subjects. The Japanese group reported an average household size of 3.2 people while Americans reported an average household size of 2.8 people. Sixty-nine percent of Japanese subjects were employed full-time compared with 58 percent of American subjects.

Mean scores were calculated separately by sex for each group on each item, and *t*-tests were used to test for differences between Japanese and American men and women.

Findings

The mean response to each item by each group and the results of t-tests comparing Japanese and American men and women are summarized in Table 1. Japanese and American men were found to differ significantly on ten of eleven items. Japanese and American women were found to differ significantly on nine of eleven items.

Insert table 1 about here.

Spouses as "Best-Friends" and Intimacy in Marriage

While both Japanese and American groups value marital friendship, i.e., believe that a spouse should be one's best friend (item 1), Americans believe this more strongly than do Japanese men and women.

While Japanese men and women tend to be uncertain, Americans tend to value marital intimacy. Americans believe more strongly that spouses should share everything, including feelings, interests, and worries (item 2).

Extra-Marital Intimacy and Friendship

Americans view extra-marital intimacy and friendship more positively than do Japanese men and women. Americans

believe more strongly than Japanese men and women that married people should have close friendships outside of marriage, extra-marital friendships wherein feelings, interests and secrets are shared (item 3).

Japanese subjects tend to believe more strongly than Americans that a close extra-marital friendship, wherein feelings and secrets are shared, would have harmful effects on marriage (item 4). Similarly, Japanese subjects believe more strongly than Americans that extra-marital friendship would threaten marriage unless the person were a friend of both husband and wife instead of just one or the other (item 5).

Recreation and Socializing with Co-workers

While Americans tend to believe more strongly that husbands should come home immediately after work, to be with their families rather than socialize with co-workers (item 6), Japanese tend to believe more strongly that husbands should socialize with co-workers after work if it helps their careers (item 7). Neither group believe that employed wives/mothers should socialize with co-workers after work (item 8).

Spousal Involvement in Work-related Socialization

Americans tend to place a higher value on spousal involvement in work-related socialization than do Japanese.

Americans believe more strongly than Japanese that spouses should make friends and socialize with husband's (or wife's) co-workers (item 9), and that husbands/wives should include spouses in socialization with co-workers (after work, at office parties, etc.) (item 10).

Socialization as Couples vs. Individuals

While both groups tend to believe that married people should socialize as couples rather than as individuals (item 11), American men (but not women) believe this more strongly than do Japanese.

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Table 1. Friendship and Socialization: A Comparison of Japanese and American Ideals.

Item	Men			Women		
	Japanese n = 406 Mean	American n = 274 Mean	t	Japanese n = 466 Mean	American n = 569 Mean	t
1. One's spouse should be one's best friend.	4.03	4.27	3.71***	4.19	4.44	5.30***
2. Spouses should share everything (feelings, interests, worries).	3.42	3.89	5.68***	3.38	4.07	10.76***
3. A husband or wife should have a close friendship outside of marriage, where feelings, interests and secrets are shared.	3.28	3.53	2.97**	3.56	3.76	3.05**
4. A close relationship, where feelings and secrets are shared with someone other than a spouse would harm many marriages.	3.42	3.01	-4.85***	3.29	2.87	-6.19***
5. A close friendship with someone other than one's spouse would threaten a marriage unless the person were a friend of both husband and wife.	3.51	2.87	-7.94***	3.39	2.72	-10.53***
6. Husbands should come home immediately after work, to be with family rather than socialize with co-workers.	2.99	3.17	2.25*	2.97	3.15	3.01**
7. Husbands should socialize with co-workers after work if it helps their careers, even though it leaves less time for family.	3.14	2.63	-6.93***	3.00	2.60	-7.28***
8. An employed wife/mother should socialize with co-workers after work if it helps her career, even if it leaves less time for her family.	2.51	2.48	-0.45	2.46	2.55	1.73
9. A wife/husband should make friends and socialize with her/his spouse's co-workers.	3.32	3.54	3.45***	3.56	3.70	2.97**
10. A husband/wife should include his/her spouse in socialization with co-workers (after work, at office parties, etc.).	2.87	3.79	14.45***	2.97	3.97	20.27***
11. Married people should socialize together as couples rather than as individuals.	3.56	3.75	2.99**	3.66	3.57	-1.64

Note. Means were calculated from Likert scale scores, i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.